

2003

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Toriello's Tergiversations

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The following is a chronological development on the changes in the Guatemalan Government position, with respect to the recent arms shipment.

On May 19, LRS, a major Buenos Aires radio station, quoted this May 18 statement of the Guatemala Foreign Ministry: "The purchase of arms from any nation in the world is a normal exercise of a country's sovereignty."

On the same day, the official government radio, Guatemala, stated: "The Guat. For Ministry has maintained a certain reserve about the alarming declarations made by the U. S. State Department about the purchase of arms which Guat. is alleged to have made from Russia. Nothing official is known about it." The same broadcast quoted this statement made by Toriello at his press conference of the preceding day (May 18): "He disauthorizes all and each of the press statements issued yesterday about the declarations of the U. S. State Department and press saying that the Guatemala Government had obtained arms from a certain European nation."

On May 21, Radio Cooperativa Vitalicia, a commercial Valparaiso radio station, cited a statement made by the Guatemalan Embassy at Santiago, in the substance that the imputation that Guatemala had been importing arms from Poland was absolutely false.

On May 21, TIDCR, a San Jose, Costa Rica commercial radio station broadcast the substance of an official Guatemalan communique, as follows: "This country [Guatemala] has not bought arms from Soviet Union or from anyone, however, if it had done so, it would have been exercising its legitimate right as a sovereign country to trade freely with any nation of the world."

On May 22, the New York Times quoted statements made by Foreign Minister Toriello on the preceding day (May 21) in which Toriello acknowledged the shipment of arms had landed, charged the "governing circles of the United States" with having committed an "act of aggression against Guatemala" by withholding arms needed for defense or to repel an invasion; The Times story cited the Government's formal statement that Guatemala had never negotiated the purchase of arms from the Soviet Union or Poland. The New York Times story continues as follows: "When Senor Toriello was reminded that the State Department had not named either country as a source of the arms, but had stated that they came from Communist-controlled territory, the Minister replied: 'For us, Communist-controlled territory is the Soviet Union. Other countries are sovereign!.' [sic]

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On May 25, Agence France Presse quoted Toriello from the May 24 press conference, as follows: "Questioned as to the truth of foreign reports that the U. S. has seized two ships with arms for Guatemala, Toriello stated flatly that Guatemala had not placed any order for arms."

On May 25, also, COHO, a Santiago, Cuba, commercial radio station, broadcast a Toriello statement that the order announced by the United States to intercept shipping suspected of carrying arms from Communist countries to any American country, would be an act of piracy. Toriello added that his country was not expecting any further shipments of arms, because Guatemala had already obtained sufficient to enforce peace and the sovereignty of the country. [There are numerous creditable reports from European and other sources, indicating that Guatemala had made further purchase orders and shipping arrangements for very substantial additional quantities of arms.]

On May 26, a radio teletype from Guatemala City to the New York Times, had this statement: "Despite its acquisition of a large amount of Czech arms, the Guatemalan Government has no intention of seeking withdrawal of the U. S. Army and Air Force missions. This was stated today by Toriello and Colonel Parinello, Chief of Staff. ---the Foreign Minister, who has denied that any more arms are on the way here, said the government will not make public the details of the type or amount of arms purchased."

On May 29, a TASS broadcast from Moscow, came to Guatemalan support, quoting from Izvestia, as follows: "Guatemala is also falsely accused of purchasing a large quantity of arms from People's Democracies."

On May 30, a commercial radio station in Santiago, Chile, quoted from a telephone interview by Diario De Colombia, Bogota, with Toriello, as follows: "Asked if it were true that Guatemala had Communist-made arms, Toriello answered: There is not one single arm in Guatemala of such origin."

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In addition to the foregoing press and radio items, it is reliably reported that on or about May 20 the Guatemalan Ambassador to Panama told high officials of the Panamanian Government that the arms in this shipment had been purchased by Guatemala from Mexico, and shipped direct from Veracruz to Puerto Barrios. The Mexican Government has flatly denied this assertion.

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